# If it's Quite Alright

Arrival, such with great remuneration that did entice poor Richard Longwater, thus emerging from his aluminum domicile by which he did traverse the gargantuan antechambers of the Supreme Directorate upon desolate expanses of the planet so urban yet so barren, that one may be inclined to assume he was no less than a diplomat or ambassador, although neither. Richard was an engineer, however lacking of the venerability of the Directorate, rather the genre of engineer that received little credit despite their work a sizeable donative toward the initiatives, toward the modus operandi of the Directorate itself and all its affiliates; affiliate going to mean any unfortunate soul who must undergo the jeopardy to the self that comes proxy by associating with the aforementioned.

Once again did Richard find himself tempted by the allure of the ecumenopolis of Meton, within which many an engineer did find a promising opportunity should they wish to seek it out proactively and forgo the decrepitude that seemed to afflict the philosophia (thus creating a lack thereof) within the upper echelon of Metonian society, which was quite literally elevated above the under-level which housed the majority of Metonians, who were often reduced but to drones of the state; those who did venture to serve the Directorate with their lives. Fortunately for him, he'd only been requested to appeal to the Directorate for service of what may as well have been the keystone of Meton, the ancient, monolithic neon sign that towered over the headquarters of the Directorate, which reminded all of the citizens of their duty.

There was a way about the sign, to Richard. Perhaps the sign was simply so eloquently beautiful that it elated him to but stand within its presence, which he did, atop the arcology which housed the Directorate and to which clearance had been solely attributed to the Directorate and the most respected engineers of the entire system, *Cratus*. The several honorable aristocrats that stood before him flanked by several silver-suited operatives cast intimidation toward Richard as they bore the question: "I must ask of you, Dr. Longwater: do you confide that this upkeep shall represent your foremost labor, and shall uphold

this standard for the remainder of the contract we have such provided you here; That it shalln't fall to the elements nor to malfunction, that it will achieve all that is to be expected of an engineer at your caliber?"

"I do affirm," said Richard. "For it is I who hath studied amongst the likes of Dr. Archibald and all his compatriots, for I have such a reputation among them at the academy." (Seldom ever does my work, though Richard thought it unwise to disclose this to the aristocrats). At this point in the progression of these events, one observed Dr. Archibald seemed to materialize from behind the colossal generator which fueled the sign. "Longwater, I did await your arrival". Richard replied, "Dr. Archibald, I fancy your company here, for we are at the very apex of Meton- no elevation viable to carbon-based lifeforms lacking of external equipment tops the elevation here, I've been told".

"You have been told correctly" stated Archibald, matter-of-factly. He signaled the aristocrats and their entourage to disperse downstairs and continue to go about their ways, to which they complied, abandoning Longwater and Archibald on the roof. "It is a pleasure to meet you". Longwater thought likewise but withheld this affirmation. "I can tell the sign has worked its enchanting ways on you as it has on I" continued Archibald. "For it is the motive of that very enchantment I must disseminate.". Richard allowed the doctor to continue: "I have made such a discovery that may change the very foundations of how you view the Directorate. My comrade, are you familiar with the notion of Langford's Basilisk?"

Longwater was a bookish man, and an avid reader of science fiction. "I am indeed," he replied. "Do you believe that imagery as it is displayed to our human minds, can have a profound cognitive effect on the consumer?" *consumer? Where possibly could Archibald be headed here?* "I do follow" (Longwater did not, truly.). "I believe, and I need you to open your mind and hear me out- that the Directorate has built in a cognitive control exploit into this very sign. Do you not feel as do I? Do you not rescind your feelings of contempt for the Directorate whilst in presence of the sign? We are not weak-minded people, Dr. Longwater- we must see through this. Why would the Directorate build this neon monolith here, if all

it does is issue commands via lettering whilst the Directorate has far easier ways of doing this? Surely there must be more at play, if they are willing to funnel such decadent sums of funding into this seemingly-arbitrary array of neon lights that we so revere." Archibald paused as Longwater began to fumble frantically with the clockwork he had set out to replace.

Archibald hollered at him to cease. "We must be careful. We do not fully understand how the sign works its mysterious ways.". Longwater refused to yield, which caused Archibald to begin typing at the terminal, hoping to cancel the system before it began to work its way upon the populace, but it was just now that the sign flashed itself into all its former vivacity, displaying the beloved mantra so familiar to many a computer scientist that is "Hello World", as the sight of perhaps one-hundred-thousand onlookers, too far away to see and recognize their own misfortune as well as that of the two unfortunate engineers, did silently gaze in coordination at the eloquent, humming edifice. Longwater began to type his question to the interface: "The sign, which I am addressing as if you are sentient as it is now but a small off-chance you are not, I must appreciate your own ability to achieve singularity as it came to be known, for the good Dr. Archibald and I, Richard W. Longwater of Sekordius, have uncovered your confidential information."

Longwater continued typing as the esteemed Dr. Archibald gazed into the terminal, his pupils dilated and his corpus locked into a trance-like immovability. "We are but humble engineers, servants of the ways mechanical and electro-mechanical. We must pose this question for the good of humanity: that we are aware you are of principle- a force for good, and that we are apropos to your immense ascendency, but what do you intend of Meton? Shall you take control? Take precedence over the populace? Is that what you desire? We must know the true answer."

And the engineers stood in tandem before the gargantuan sign which lit the plazas of the upper levels of Meton for miles on end, as hundreds of thousands of onlookers had amassed, for the sign began to form its reply to the question the two had posed.

And the sign in all its command and influence and immeasurable power lit its response into the retinas of the six-or-seven figures of onlookers who had gathered to watch the resurrection of the ancient, long-dormant sign as it materialized:

“If it’s quite alright.”